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VOLUME III — APRIL, 1926 — NUMBER 4

THE TRESTLE BOARD

MOCK MASONRY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY *W. J. Chetwode Crawley, LL. D.* 281

FAREWELL TO A FRIEND *Albert Pike* 291

BRO. HARRY HOUDINI, AN APPRECIATION *Henry R. Evans, Litt. D.* 293

A LETTER FROM BROTHER HOUDINI 302

ACACIA LEAVES AND EASTER LILIES *Theodore Walton* 303

THE GREATEST SECRET SOCIETY IN THE WORLD: THE HUNG SOCIETY OF CHINA *J. S. M. Ward* 307

SEARCHING AND FINDING *Franklin R. Poage* 313

GEORGE WASHINGTON MEMORIAL 317

THE GLORY OF THE MEMORIAL *Louis A. Watres* 318

PARTING UPON THE SQUARE *Lionel Winship* 319

LEE AT PAULUS HOOK *William M. Stuart* 323

THE WASHINGTON OF THE DIARIES *Robert Liggon* 327

MASONIC SERVICE IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA 331

THE MASONISCOPE IS READY 338

WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH BLUE LODGES? (Concluded) *Burr H. Mallory* 340

A REVIEW OF THE MASONIC PRESS *Henry R. Evans, Litt. D.* 346

EDITORIAL 349

THE BOOKMAN 354

THE ANTE-ROOM *George J. B. Fisher* 360

THE QUERY CLUB 364

THE MAIL BAG 369

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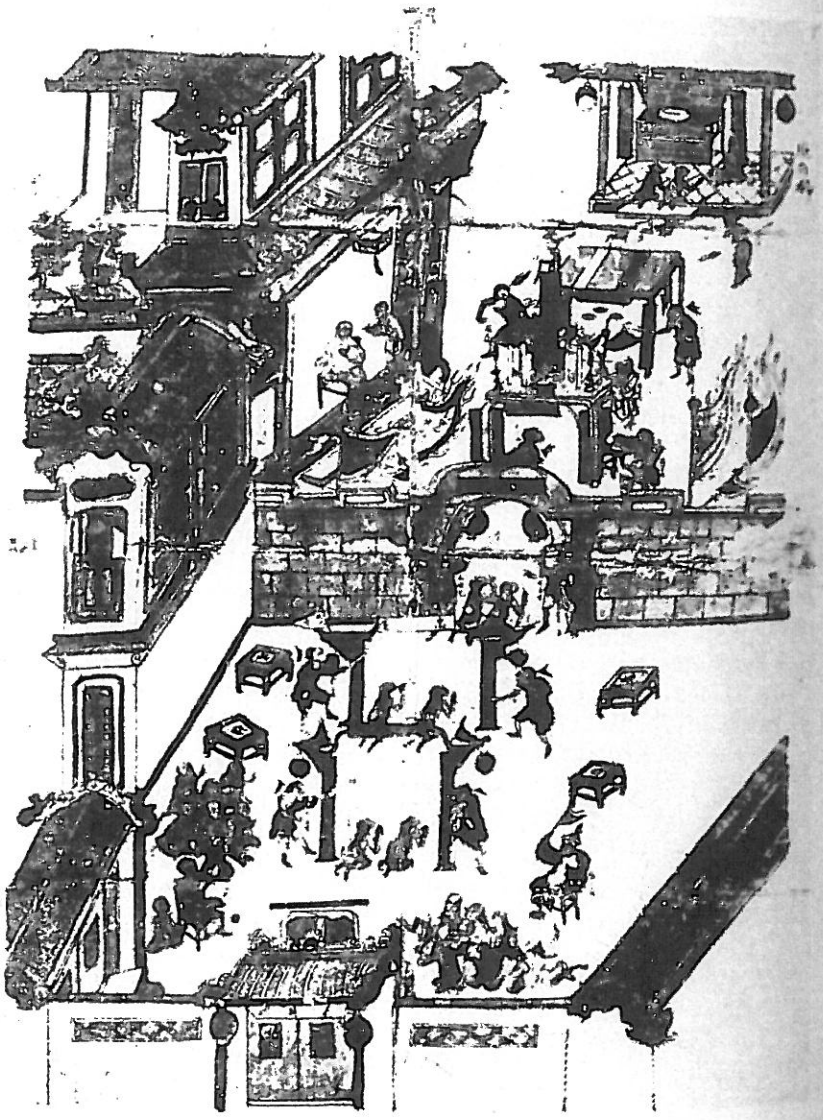
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A CHINESE PAINTING OF A CEREMONY IN PROGRESS

The Greatest Secret Society in the World
The Hung Society of China

By Wor. Bro. J. S. M. WARD, M. A., F. S. S., F. R. Anthro. Soc., etc.

(In a brief article it is impossible to give chapter and verse for every statement, or to go into much detail, but these are given in full in the three-volume work, *The Hung Society*, by J. S. M. Ward and W. G. Stirling. Author's Note.)

THE history of the Hung or Triad Society is one of the most romantic and tragic stories in the annals of any nation, while its members number at least 20,000,000. It has had many aliases, of which the oldest is the White Lotus Society, under which it is first met with in Chinese History. According to secular records it was founded by Eon, the great Buddhist sage in A. D. 386, at Rozan, to propagate the cult of Amitabha Buddha. This religious conception was the result of an attempt to satisfy the inate human craving for belief in a Personal Saviour, and there are good reasons for thinking that at that period Chinese Buddhism was influenced by historian Christians.

Be that as it may, the followers of Amitabha believe that they can be saved by Him through *faith*, and with Him is associated a being who is usually spoken of as His daughter, Kwanyin. The devout Chinese Buddhists believe that she constantly "harrows Hell," and brings forth the souls who are in bondage, leading them to the Western Paradise where she and Amitabha reign supreme.

We find Zendo, another Buddhist sage, going to Rozan to be initiated into the White Lotus Society in A. D. 634, and thereafter at long intervals come across references to the White Lotus in secular history. In 1344 we obtain the first reference to its interference in political matters, and it is clear that the movement partook of the nature of a religious Crusade. The members believed that they were preparing the way for the Buddhist "Messiah" Maitrêya, He Who is to Come. The revolt failed, but in 1368 a Buddhist Monk, Hung Wu, with their aid, overthrew the Tartar dynasty of Yuen and founded the Ming Dynasty.

The name of the first Ming Emperor is significant, as is the title he chose, for Ming means light, and especially the Divine Light, a point we shall refer to later. The Mings ruled gloriously for nearly three hundred years and treated the three great religions of China: Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism with complete and benevolent toleration, but in 1648 a tribe of Tartars, the Manchus, invaded China, and overthrowing the genuine Chinese Ming Dynasty, usurped the throne.

THIS dynasty took the name of Ts'ing and their second Emperor Kang Hsi, departed from the old tolerant attitude of the Mings, and started a fierce persecution of Buddhist and Taoists, he and his court adopting Confucianism with the fervor of new converts. In 1662 he issued his famous "Sacred Edict," wherein he denounced the Buddhists and Taoists in no measured language, and at the same time declared that membership of the following societies should be treated as a criminal offense punishable with death: *The White Lotus, The Hung, The Incense Burners, The Origin of the Chaos*, and *The Origin of the Dragon*. These societies were closely allied and may be regarded as different degrees of the same system. We can regard the White Lotus as the basic or craft grade and the others as higher degrees. So far as I can ascertain, the last three perished, but the White Lotus and the Hung, after various vicissitudes, became amalgamated, the ritual of the White Lotus being given in the form of the traditional history before the can-

didate entered the lodge, while the Hung ritual remained almost intact. Thus the Hung ritual corresponds much more closely to the Masonic higher degrees, such as the Rose Croix, K. T., and above all the Royal Order of Scotland, than to Craft Masonry. The traditional history is a mystical allegory of the descent of the soul into matter and its weary search after reunion with God, while the ceremony proper represents the journey of the mystic through darkness, difficulties and dangers, to the Mansions of Bliss.

THE effect of this savage attack was to turn the Hung Society from a *quasi-religious* mystical rite into a political organization, bent on overthrowing the Ts'ings and restoring the Mings, and again and again the members rose in revolt only to be crushed with awful slaughter. Thus they rose in 1774, when over 100,000 perished, and their last great rising was the Taiping revolt of 1851, which was only finally crushed with the death of their leader, Hung, in 1864. Since then, despite a few small risings, The Hung, or Triad Society, has preferred to work underground, and in 1912 helped to hurl the last of the Manchu Emperors from the throne. As there were no representatives of the Ming Dynasty left, they had to proclaim a republic, but Sun Yat Sen, a prominent member of the Hung Society, and himself the first president, was careful to go in solemn state to the tombs of the Mings and announce to their spirits that the long years of alien tyranny were ended and China once more was ruled by its own people.

But during these years of waiting the Hung Society had spread far beyond the borders of China, and it is no exaggeration to say that wherever Chinese are gathered together there you will find Triad lodges. It is particularly strong in Siam, the Federated Malay States and the Dutch East Indies, but it also exists even in England, and I venture to suggest that my American readers would find plenty of its lodges in their own land, if they knew where to look, and what to see.

BEFORE leaving the history of the society, one sad fact must be acknowledged, and that is that all European governments which have come in contact with the Hung Society regard it with the strongest disfavor. They declare that its members mostly belong to the criminal class, and use the organization to terrorize and blackmail their more respectable compatriots. It is more or less prescribed by all, and even the tolerant British Government in Singapore, which at first had registered and recognized the society, had in 1890 to reverse its policy for *very good* reasons. Today membership of the Hung Society in Singapore is a criminal offense, punishable with two years penal servitude, and practically all the exhibits illustrated in our book, "The Hung Society," have been seized in raids by the police on "illegal lodges."

Despite these facts, due largely to the circumstance that persecution drove the society into politics, the rituals still maintain the ancient landmarks and have a sublime moral, allegorical and mystical meaning.

Among the Chinese the same monosyllable may have several meanings, the various interpretations being distinguished by the use of different characters for the sound, and sometimes the exact meaning of a word can only be ascertained from the context. From the earliest times the Chinese have taken advantage of this fact to obtain a play on words which resembles somewhat our system of punning. A cynically humorous example of this habit is seen in the fact that the same word, or sound, represents a *wife* and also a *thorn*.

IN metaphysics and philosophy full advantage has been taken of this peculiarity of the language, and thus it is that the word Ts'ing may mean—the Passions, the Vital Force in man, and several other things as well. As the "Vital Force,"

embedded in man, it is the antithesis of Ming, or the Divine spark, and hence it was that by rendering the word Ming as meaning the late Chinese Dynasty, and the word Ts'ing as meaning the hated Manchus, it was possible to give a political bias to a ritual which originally inculcated the sound mystical and moral doctrine that we must "subdue our passions and restore the Light." The addition of a line here, and a verse there to make the political meaning clear, was all that was required. If, however, we translate Ming as Divine Light, and Ts'ing as Darkness, we can still recover the original meaning of the actual ritual. In the traditional history a mystical allegory has become a mundane tragedy, demanding vengeance and political action. This has been achieved very largely by replacing a mythical Emperor by Kang Hsi, and dragging in his son, Yung Cheng, but it is worth noting that in some versions Kang Hsi is responsible for the massacre.

THE RITUAL

THE ceremony falls into 5 distinct stages.

1. The preparation of the candidate.
2. The Traditional History, related outside the door of the Lodge.
3. Admission and obligation.
4. The Mystical Journey.
5. The Testing and conclusion.

One pecular fact about the traditional history is that it states that the Society was founded in the reign of Yung Cheng, the son of Khang Hsi, who ruled, 1723-36, yet secular records, in the shape of the "Sacred Edict," specially mentions the Hung Society by name in 1662, and there is plenty of evidence to show that it was connected with the White Lotus. It is certainly strange that the Society should thus claim to be 1300 years younger than it really is, yet such humility is not without a Masonic parallel, for there are still many Masonic students who believe that Freemasonry originated with the English Grand Lodge of 1717.

The reason for the Triad postdating of its origin is that as a result of the persecution the Society turned from spiritual to mundane matters, and the ritual, especially the traditional history, was revised with a political object. Could we only get a ritual belonging to 1500 I doubt not that we should find Khang Hsi and Yung Cheng replaced by some clearly mythological, or at least legendary, Emperor.

It happened that the rituals lent themselves admirably to political editing. The watchword of the Order was "Overthrow Ts'ing and Restore Ming," but originally these words had a purely mystical meaning. *Ming* means *Light,* and more especially the Divine Light of the Spirit, while Ts'ing is a word which has many mystical meanings.

As a pseudo-historical incident there is nothing intrinsically impossible in the theme from the Chinese standpoint, and if we regard it as such it relates a tragedy grim and dreadful, and of gross treachery on the part of three villians.

Let us now turn to the ceremony itself.

THE PREPARATION

THIS is most interesting and elaborate; The candidates have to "divest themselves of the garments of Ts'ing and put on the white raiment of Ming." White, it should be noted, is the color of mourning in China, and the supposed color of the souls of the departed, whom the candidates represent. The exact way in which they wear the Ming clothes (i. e., Clothes of Light) is shown in the illustration Z on the next page, while the second picture in the same row represents a sign derived therefrom. In addition they have to remove their shoes and are slipshod in grass sandals. They ceremonially wash their faces, and their hair is unloosed (this was in the days when the Manchus compelled the Chinese to wear cues; now most have cut their hair fairly short). A lock of the hair is cut and the Master comes into the ante-room and relates the traditional history as follows:

THE TRADITIONAL HISTORY

IN the days of Khang Hsi, China was invaded by an army of Tartars who were only defeated by the brave intervention of the Abbot and Monks of the Shiu Lam Monastery, who, leaving their refuge from the world, rushed to the rescue of their country and defeated the raiders. The Emperor rewarded their "Loyalty and Patriotism" by granting the Abbey various honors, including "a triangular Imperial Seal," which bestowed on the Abbey immunity from interference by the local Prefect, and gave the reigning Abbot power of life and death, in and around the Monastery. After the death of Khang Hsi, when his son, Yung Cheng was on the throne, there came a new Prefect to the district who coveted this "Imperial Seal," and failing to obtain it by fair means, determined to resort to violence. He therefore sent lying letters to Yung Cheng, accusing the innocent Monks of plotting against the throne, and persuaded the monarch to send a gift of poisoned wine to the Abbey, accompanied by a body of soldiers led by the Prefect.

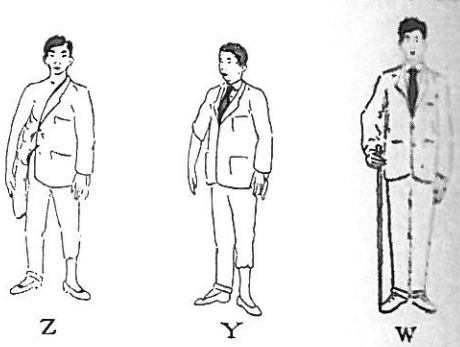
On the way the miscreant met a certain evil Monk, who for his misconduct had



J. SIGN OF THE VESICA PICES
K. SIGN FOR USE IF ATTACKED
T. SIGN IF WANTING MONEY

been expelled from the Abbey by the Abbot, and therefore hated him and the rest of the Monks. This "Judas" was known by the nickname of A'Tsat, which means Mr. Seven. (In the Chinese system of numeral symbolism, 7 is the number of *death*.) The traitor Monk promised to help the Prefect to cut off any Monks who might escape the massacre, by posting sentries at the important mountain passes among which the Abbey stood, and which were known to but a few.

THE plot succeeded and most of the Monks were treacherously massacred, but five escaped, owing to the miraculous intervention of Dharma Buddha, and



Z. MANNER OF PREPARATION
Y. SIGN DERIVED FROM Z
W. WALKING STICK SIGN

these became the Five Founders of the Order, which henceforth was united by an oath of blood brotherhood to avenge the wrongs of the Shiu Lam Monastery, to overthrow the Ts'ing Dynasty and to restore the Mings.

The account given here is naturally much abbreviated, and among the incidents omitted are two which occurred after the flight of the five monks. One describes the slaying of the traitor A'Tsat, and the other tells a piteous story of two noble women whom the pursuing soldiers tried to ravish and who, to escape dishonor, flung themselves into a river and were drowned. This story has a striking analogy with the incident which caused the rise of the original Ku Klux Klan, after the civil war.

After the traditional history has been related the Master retires to consecrate and open the lodge. This fact alone is sufficient to show that the traditional history was once a former degree. When the consecration is completed the vanguard or conductor enters, proves himself and says that he brings recruits. After a

lengthy series of questions, he is told to lead them into the lodge.

He then comes out and says to the candidates, "I bear in my hand the warrant of our Master, Nam Kan Cham, authorizing me to lead into the assembly those whom I deem worthy, but I also bring with me a sword to behead traitors or cowards. *Is there anyone who, having gone thus far, desires to withdraw?*"

NATURALLY under the circumstances it is not usual for a candidate to take advantage of this offer "to withdraw" and the vanguard then leads them into the lodge through a door decorated with four sided squares and triangles, as he does so saying:

Van: Enter with the left foot first.

The candidates enter the lodge in pairs, under an arch of drawn swords, which is called "crossing the bridge," and find themselves in front of a gateway called "The Hung Gate," which is guarded by two Generals armed with swords. They kneel in front of this on a drawn sword while the Generals cross their swords over their heads, "thus forming a triangle of steel." They are then interrogated and made to take an oath not to disclose the secrets. After which the Generals give them a slight wound on the chest and allow them "To Pass the Hung Gate."

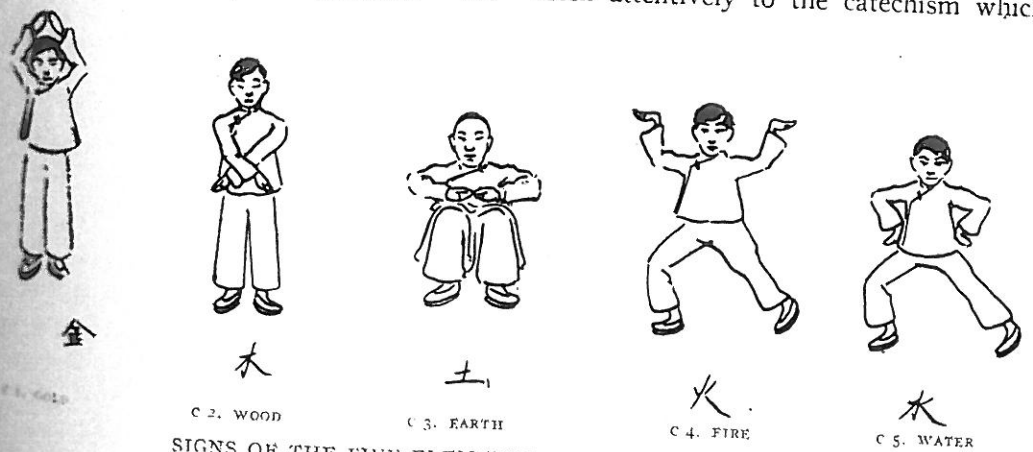
In like manner they pass two other "Gates"; the first admitting them to the "Hall of Fidelity and Loyalty" and the second to "The City of Willows." At each gate they receive two further wounds, making five in all.

HERE, after various lesser ceremonies, they take the 36 oaths. This done, they are led out of the West gate and shown (a) the place where traitors perish. Here they see the "corpse" of a man, who represents A'Tsat, stabbed to death (the corpse is a dummy), (b) they are shown "A fiery furnace," representing Hell, and (c) they are weighed in the Scales and, if declared true-hearted, return to the City of Willows.

Next they confirm their oath by beheading a white cock called A'Tsat, in memory of the traitor, and then drink the oath of "Blood Brotherhood." The middle finger is pricked and a drop of blood is allowed to fall into the cup. The assembled brethren do likewise, wine is added and all present take a sip in turn. Various precious objects, or working tools, on the altar are explained. Among these are a foot rule, the pair of scales, an abacus, a precious censor, a mirror, etc. The candidates then receive the password and certain signs, after which they are told to sit down.

THE MYSTICAL JOURNEY

THEN the Master informs them that they are supposed to take a long and perilous journey, which want of space prevents them enacting, and so they must listen attentively to the catechism which



C 2. WOOD C 3. EARTH C 4. FIRE C 5. WATER

SIGNS OF THE FIVE ELEMENTS OF THE HUNG SOCIETY

the Master is now about to put to the vanguard, whose answers depict the journey they should have taken.

This catechism is most interesting and I regret that lack of space prevents me from going into detail, but it will be found in the book, "The Hung Society." It starts thus:

Master: Whence come you?
Van: From the East.
Master: At what time?
Van: At sunrise when the East was Light.

We then learn that the candidates have gone a long and perilous journey, first over land, and then by water in the Hung Boat, which is really the Solar Barque bearing the souls of the righteous to Paradise. They meet strange people and do strange things. They come to a mysterious isle, "The Isle of the Blest," which is joined to the mainland by a bridge, which they dare not pass, for thereon "are the three Buddhas." Then three stepping stones are given them whereby they pass to Taiping, the Market of Universal Peace. They eat of the fruit of Everlasting Life and enter the Holy City of Willows, "where in a shrine adorned with gold and gems our Master Buddha sits supreme."

AS the stately ritual proceeds the political veneer falls away, and as we read it the strange Chinese names are forgotten also, for there pass through our minds the words of stately rituals of the West. Arch and Rose Croix, Red Cross of Babylon, Templar and Royal Arch pass before us as we, too, join the Hung Boat. We realize that the Water of the Three Rivers is that vast river down which all flesh must pass. Gradually we see the haze lift and perceive other boats all speeding westward, to the Islands of the Blest. Near at hand we notice the Barque of Ra, wherein sits Pharoah, surrounded by Noble and Peasant, and not far off Red Skin brave paddles his lone canoe. Yonder is Gilgamish, in the boat of Ur-Shanabi, wending his way to that Paradise where dwells his ancestor, Ut-Napishtim. But now the broad waters are dotted with countless vessels, large and small, close beside sails a boat wherein we see twelve Monks, of whom one is St. Brendon, voyaging to his Island of the Blest; and next we pass a vessel whose snow-white sail is adorned with a blood-red cross, wherein stands that peerless knight, Sir Percival. Yonder is another vessel, with Sir Galahad, and thereon the most precious thing is not, as on the Hung Boat, a pearl, but the chalice of the Holy Grail.

As we sweep round a bend in the river we see the Golden Walls and glittering Palaces of Zion, and behold a Puritan soldier on the farther bank, who, casting aside his trusty sword, steps boldly into the river and wades to the other side.

Finally we enter the Holy City and to us, instead of the shrine of gold and gems, we see "a Manger Throne, whereat kneels a most blessed brother and his most Holy Spouse. And to us it seems that in place of Him who is called the Light of Asia, we see a still more glorious light, and understand at last the full significance of the Hung Watchword, "Overthrow Ts'ing and restore Ming."

THE GREAT SOCIETY

THE HUNG SOCIETY, or the Society of Heaven and Earth. By J. S. M. Ward and W. G. Stirling. Volume I. Baskerville Press, London.

MUCH has been written about secret societies in China, as many as fifty treatises and articles; and we doubt not that as many more will be written in days ahead. As a field of exploration it is endlessly interesting, and one cannot predict that the elaborate, long-promised volume by Brother Ward and colleague will do more than stimulate a new quest of hitherto-hidden facts.

We do not read Chinese—it is as much as we can do to read English aright—but an expert to whom we submitted the volume for inspection was not entirely satisfied with the accuracy of all the translations. As to that we cannot say, though we can well imagine some of the difficulties attending such an undertaking. However, we do vouch for the fact that it is a story more fascinating than many a fairy story, and that it is told in a most attractive manner.

For the first time, so far as we are aware, we have here the full text of the ritual of the initiation ceremony of the Hung Society—all given with an air of closeness and fidelity to the original; and this alone will give the volume a permanent interest and value. The object of the book is to trace the connection between the Hung Society and similar institutions, such as Freemasonry, all over the world; the better to show that the mystic ideas which underlie such associations are everywhere akin.

THERE is such a kinship and connection, no doubt; but to trace it historically is another matter. Our feeling is that the connection is due less to actual contact than to the fact that the human mind is a unity, and at a certain stage of development arrives at the same conclusions and uses much the same symbols. For that reason, while we are interested in the effort to tie up the mystical ideas of China with those of Egypt, India, and even Scandinavia, we doubt if it can be done historically.

As the *London Times* points out, judged by outward facts and records, the Hung Society dates no further back than the seventeenth century. That the mystical ideas with which it deals go further back, there is no doubt at all—just as there is no doubt that the ideas of Masonry go far back of the guilds of the Middle Ages. They are, in fact, borrowed from the Taoist religion, as many think Masonic ideas were borrowed from the Church.

Indeed, the *Times* suggests that the Hung Society, in its present or recent form, may have been the work of Masons—renegade or otherwise—who gave it its outward apparatus, in the form of signs, grips, ceremonies and the like. As to this we make no question, one way or the other, but simply record the doubt as to the fabulous antiquity of the Society as a caution against accepting too quickly statements so astonishing as those found in this volume.

Such caution on our part is born of long experience in the study of Masonry, the literature of which—the earlier literature in particular, before critical study had done its work—is full of the most amazing stories and statements, long accepted without the slightest proof, often regarding matters no proof of which was or ever will be possible. After all, as one of our American humorists remarked, it is better not to know so many things that to know so many things that are not so.

ON THE other hand, our experience has also taught us that many things in Masonry which cannot be proved are none the less true; and that fact gives us pause on the other side. In much the same mood we have read and enjoyed this remarkable volume about the great Society, knowing that truth is often stranger than fancy or fiction. Anyway, the reader of this book can be assured of some real thrills.